

Exit Routes and Employee Alarm Systems

WAC 296-800-310

Summary

YOUR RESPONSIBILITY:

To provide and maintain emergency exit routes and to install and maintain adequate employee alarm systems

Exit Routes

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You must

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Exemption:

This rule doesn't apply to vehicles, vessels, or other mobile structures.



Note:

The introduction has important information about building, electrical and fire codes that may apply to you in addition to WISHA rules. See "How do the WISHA rules relate to building, fire, and electrical codes" in the Introduction Section of this book.



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WAC 296-800-310

Rule

EXIT ROUTES

WAC 296-800-31005

Provide an adequate number of exit routes

You must

- Provide a minimum of 2 exit routes to provide different ways for employees to leave the workplace safely during an emergency (at least 2 of the exit routes must be remote from one another so employees can safely exit if one exit route becomes blocked or unavailable).
- Provide an adequate number (at least 2) of exit routes, considering the kind, number, location and capacity, appropriate to each building according to the following conditions:
 - Number of employees
 - Size of building
 - Arrangement of workplace
 - Building occupancy



Note:

A single exit route is permitted where the number of employees, the size of the building, its occupancy, or the arrangement of the workplace indicates that a single exit will allow all employees to exit safely during an emergency. Other means of escape, such as fire exits or accessible windows, should be available where only one exit route is provided.

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Rule

WAC 296-800-31010

Make sure that exit routes are large enough

You must

- Make sure each exit route is large enough to accommodate the maximum-permitted occupant load for each floor served by the route.
- Make sure the capacity of an exit route doesn't decrease at any point.
- Make sure an exit route is at least 6 feet 8 inches high at all points.
 - Make sure objects that stick out into the exit route, such as fans hanging from the ceilings or cabinets on walls, don't reduce the minimum height and width of the exit route.
- Make sure exit routes are at least 28 inches wide at all points between any handrails.
 - If necessary, routes must be wider than 28 inches to accommodate the expected occupant load.



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Rule

WAC 296-800-31015

Make sure that exit routes meet their specific design and construction requirements

You must

- Make sure each exit is a permanent part of the workplace.
- Make sure an exit route has only those openings necessary to permit access to, or exit from, occupied areas of the workplace.
- Make sure any opening into an exit through a fire wall is protected by a self-closing fire door that remains closed.
- Make sure each fire door, its frame, and its hardware is listed or approved by a nationally recognized testing laboratory.
- Make sure construction materials, used to separate an exit route, have at least:
 - One-hour fire resistance rating if the exit connects 3 stories or less.
 - 2-hour fire resistance rating if the exit connects 4 stories or more.
- Make sure employees are provided with stairs or a ramp, if the exit route isn't substantially level.

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WAC 296-800-310

Rule

WAC 296-800-31020

Make sure that each exit route leads outside

You must

- Make sure that building exit routes lead:
 - Directly outside or to a street, walkway;
- **OR**
 - To an open space with access to the outside.
 - To streets, walkways, or open spaces large enough to accommodate all building occupants likely to use the exit.
- Make sure the exit routes clearly show the route employees use to leave the building in an emergency.
- Install a standard safeguard with a warning sign, if a doorway or corner of a building could allow an employee to walk in front of an engine or trolley.
- Use doors, partitions, or other effective means to show employees the correct route out of the building, if the stairs in your exit route lead anywhere but out of the building.



Note:

If the stairs in your exit route lead past the exit to the basement, you might install a gate at the point they lead towards that basement. The gate could help your employees stay on the exit route taking them out of the building.

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WAC 296-800-310

Rule

WAC 296-800-31025

Provide unobstructed access to exit routes

You must

- (1) Provide exit routes that are always free of obstructions so all employees can safely exit the building during an emergency.
- (2) Make sure employees aren't required to travel to a dead end or through a room that can be locked, such as a restroom.

WAC 296-800-31030

Exit doors must be readily opened from the inside



Exemption:

An exit door may be locked or blocked from the inside in a mental, penal, or correctional institution, if supervisory personnel are continuously on duty and a plan exists to remove employees and inmates during an emergency.

You must

- Make sure all exit doors readily open from the inside without keys, tools, or special knowledge. A device that locks only from the outside, such as a panic bar, is permitted. An exit door must be free of any device or alarm that could restrict emergency use of an exit if the device or alarm fails.

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WAC 296-800-310

Rule

WAC 296-800-31035

Use side-hinged doors to connect rooms to exit routes

You must

- Use a side-hinged exit door to connect any room to an exit route. The door must swing out when the room:
 - Is occupied by more than 50 persons**OR**
 - Contains highly flammable or explosive materials.

WAC 296-800-31040

Provide outdoor exit routes that meet these requirements

You must

- Make sure an outdoor exit route (such as an interior balcony, porch, gallery, or roof) meets all requirements for an indoor exit route. In addition, an outdoor exit route must also:
 - Have guardrails to protect unenclosed sides.
 - Be covered if snow or ice is likely to accumulate without regular removal.
 - Be reasonably straight with smooth, solid, substantially level floors.
 - Have no dead ends more than 20 feet long that branch off of the exit route.



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WAC 296-800-310

Rule

WAC 296-800-31045

Minimize danger to employees while they are using emergency exit routes

You must

- Maintain each exit route to minimize danger to employees during an emergency.
- Keep each exit route free of explosive or highly flammable furnishings and decorations.
- Not require employees to travel toward areas where high hazard materials are stored, unless the route is protected by partitions or physical barriers. High hazard materials are materials that:
 - Burn quickly
 - Emit poisonous fumes when burned
 - Are explosive

WAC 296-800-31050

Mark exits adequately

You must

- Mark each exit with a clearly visible, distinctive sign reading "EXIT."
- Make sure the letters in the word "EXIT" are at least six inches high and 3/4 inch wide.
- Mark any doorway or passage that might be mistaken for an exit with "NOT AN EXIT" or with an indication of its actual use.
- Make sure exit signs are a distinctive color.
- Make sure signs are posted and arranged along exit routes to adequately show how to get to the nearest exit and clearly indicate the direction of travel.
- Not obstruct or conceal exit signs in any way.
- Keep exit doors free of signs or decorations that obscure their visibility.

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WAC 296-800-310

Rule

WAC 296-800-31053

Provide adequate lighting for exit routes and signs

You must

- Illuminate each exit route adequately and reliably.
- Have at least 5 foot-candles illumination from a reliable light source.
- Make sure any exit signs illuminated by artificial lights and made of translucent material (other than internally illuminated types).
 - Have screens, discs or lens of at least 25 square inches in size

AND

- Show red or other designated color on the approach side of the exit.
- Make sure brightly lit signs, displays, or objects in or near the line of vision don't distract attention from the exit sign.
- Make sure exit signs that are self-lighting have a minimum luminance surface value of .06 footlamberts.

WAC 296-800-31055

Maintain the fire retardant properties of paints or other coatings

You must

- Maintain any paints or other coatings with fire retardant properties so they retain their fire retardant properties.



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WAC 296-800-310

Rule

WAC 296-800-31060

Maintain emergency safeguards

You must

- Maintain each safeguard in proper working order to protect employees during an emergency. Emergency safeguards include items such as:
 - Sprinkler systems
 - Alarm systems
 - Fire doors
 - Exit lighting.

WAC 296-800-31065

Maintain exit routes during construction and repair

You must

- Have enough exit routes that comply with these rules before letting your employees occupy a workplace under new construction.
- Make sure that employees don't occupy an existing workplace unless:
 - All exits and existing fire protection are maintained

OR

 - Alternate fire protection is provided that ensures an equivalent level of safety.
- Make sure that flammable or explosive materials used during construction or repair don't expose employees to additional hazards or prevent emergency escape.

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WAC 296-800-310

Rule

WAC 296-800-31067

Provide doors in freezer or refrigerated rooms that open from the inside

You must

- Make sure that walk-in refrigerators or freezer rooms have doors with opening devices allowing them to be opened from the inside even when they are locked from the outside.

EMPLOYEE ALARM SYSTEMS

WAC 296-800-31070

Install and maintain an appropriate employee alarm system



Exemptions:

- If you have 10 or fewer employees in a particular workplace, you can use direct voice communication to sound the alarm, if all employees can hear it. For this kind of workplace, you don't need a back-up system.
- In workplaces where employees wouldn't otherwise be able to recognize audible or visible alarms, you can use tactile devices to alert them.

You must

- Make sure that a working employee alarm system with a distinctive signal to warn employees of fire or other emergencies is installed and maintained, unless employees can see or smell a fire or other hazard.

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Exit Routes and Employee Alarm Systems

WAC 296-800-310

Rule

WAC 296-800-31070 (Continued)

- Make sure that the following systems meet the requirements of this rule, if you use them as your employee alarm system:
 - Supervisory alarms.
 - Discharge alarms.
 - Detection systems required on fixed extinguishing systems.
 - Detection systems required on fire suppression systems.
- Make sure that your employee alarm systems are:
 - Providing enough warning to allow employees to safely escape from the workplace, the immediate work area, or both.
 - Noticeable above surrounding noise or light levels by all employees in the affected portions of the workplace.
 - Distinctive and recognizable as a signal, to evacuate the work area.
 - Restored to working order as soon as possible, after each test or alarm.
 - Supervised, if installed after July 1, 1982, and if it has that capacity.
 - Able to alert assigned personnel whenever a malfunction exists in the system.
 - Adequately warning employees of emergencies.
 - Serviced, maintained, and tested by a person trained in the alarm system's design and functions to keep the system operating reliably and safely.
 - In working order, except when undergoing repairs or maintenance.
 - Warning employees of fire or other emergencies with a distinctive signal, if they aren't able to see or smell a fire or other hazard.
 - Manual actuation devices that, if provided, are unobstructed, easy to find, and readily accessible.
 - Using alarm devices, components, combinations of devices, or systems with approved construction and installation. This applies to steam whistles, air horns, strobe lights, or similar lighting devices, as well as tactile devices.

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Rule

WAC 296-800-31070 (Continued)

- Supplied with spare alarm devices available to restore the system promptly if a component breaks, is worn, or destroyed.
- Kept in full operating condition by maintaining and replacing power supplies as often as necessary.
- Supplied with a back-up means of alarm, such as employee runners or telephones, when regular systems are out of service.

WAC 296-800-31075

Establish procedures for sounding emergency alarms

You must

- Explain to each employee how to sound the alert for emergencies. Methods of reporting emergencies can include:
 - Manual pull box alarms
 - Public address systems
 - Radio
 - Telephones.
- Post emergency numbers near telephones, employee notice boards, or other conspicuous locations, if you use telephones to report emergencies.
- Require that all emergency messages have priority over all nonemergency messages if the communication system also serves as an employee alarm system.



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WAC 296-800-310

Rule

WAC 296-800-31080

Test the employee alarm system

You must

- Test the reliability and adequacy of your employee alarm system every 2 months.
 - Use a different activation device in each test of a multiactuation device system, so the entire alarm system gets tested.
- Make sure that supervised (monitored) employee alarm systems are tested at least once a year for reliability and adequacy.

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Notes
